

WHERE WE STAND:
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS



The 10 most common languages spoken by English language learners (ELLs) in the United States are:

- Spanish
- Vietnamese
- Hmong
- Chinese, Cantonese
- Korean
- Haitian Creole
- Arabic
- Russian
- Tagalog
- Navajo

WHERE WE STAND:

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AFT Convention Resolution / **3**

Questions & Answers / **7**

Background Information / **11**

Background Reading & Resources / **16**

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AFT CONVENTION RESOLUTION

English Language Learners

Adopted July 2006

WHEREAS, bilingualism is an asset in our global economy, and it is our goal to improve the education of English language learners (ELLs); and

WHEREAS, 60 percent of all preK-12 educators nationwide currently have at least one ELL student in their classrooms, and this percentage is steadily increasing; and

WHEREAS, ELLs often have very low levels of academic achievement and educational attainment (only 57 percent of Latino ELLs graduate from high school), and ELLs often do not have access to rigorous college preparatory coursework or to high-quality career and technical education programs or appropriate guidance about postsecondary options; and

WHEREAS, school systems often place ELLs into English-only instruction before they are ready. Research indicates that it often takes ELLs up to seven years to become proficient and academically successful in a new language and frequently requires more than four years for ELLs to graduate from high school; and

WHEREAS, research on language acquisition supports native language literacy instruction as a helpful support for school language acquisition, we need more research—especially at the secondary school level—on how to raise the academic achievement and literacy rates of ELLs, ELLs with disabilities, and ELLs with limited or interrupted formal education; and

WHEREAS, current ELL testing practices often do not separate the assessment of content knowledge from the assessment of English lan-

guage proficiency, and such practices often result in improper over-and under-referrals to special education; and

WHEREAS, poor assessment practices that do not use linguistically modified assessments and other appropriate testing accommodations for ELLs often result in the misidentification of schools and school systems and lead to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act sanctions; and

WHEREAS, teacher education programs often do not expose pre-service teachers to coursework and clinical training to support ELL achievement; and

WHEREAS, there is a nationwide shortage of teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff (counselors, school psychologists, social workers, intake specialists, etc.) who have the requisite training/certification to work with ELLs, and it is common for ELLs to receive primary, direct instruction from paraprofessionals who are not under the direct supervision of a certified teacher; and

WHEREAS, there is often insufficient collaboration between the staff who work exclusively with ELLs and all other school staff; and

WHEREAS, most schools do not include ELLs in their comprehensive school reform plans, and they lack sufficient social service supports, parent education programs and outreach to families; and

WHEREAS, NCLB has insufficient funding, including those programs affecting ELLs:

RESOLVED, that the American Federation of Teachers and its affiliates:

- **Raise awareness about the urgency of closing the achievement gap for ELLs.**
- **Continue providing members and leaders with publications, professional development, and union-sponsored resources on effective instruction and on ways to increase parent and community outreach for ELLs such as Colorín Colorado.**
- **Call on the federal government to:**
 - **fund and disseminate the findings from longitudinal, independent, rigorous, scientifically based research and on what works to enable academic success and literacy for ELLs of all language backgrounds, ELLs with limited or interrupted formal education, and ELLs with disabilities, especially at the secondary school level;**

- allocate resources for comprehensive school reform plans that address how all school staff can collaborate to improve the academic performance of ELLs and that include better recruitment, retention, mentoring and induction programs of bilingual educators, teachers of ELLs and ELLs with disabilities, including a career pathway for paraprofessionals;
 - allocate funds for professional development for educators who have not worked with ELLs to provide appropriate instruction to emerging ELL populations;
 - devise assessment, accountability and school improvement systems that are fair, valid, reliable and appropriate;
 - assess the impact of high-stakes assessment on the graduation rate of ELLs;
 - assure that high school accountability systems permit late-entry ELLs more than the standard four years to graduate from high school; and
 - adopt the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act or similar legislation that would allow undocumented students who fulfill the requisite criteria of the DREAM Act—as referred to in AFT’s resolution of support adopted in 2005—to enroll in college and seek conditional residency status.
- Call on schools of education to incorporate courses and experiences that prepare teachers to meet the instructional needs of ELLs.
- Support the implementation of research-based instructional models for ELLs such as dual immersion, ESL and other programs that include:
 - a school culture of high expectations for all students;
 - prescreening and ongoing assessment programs that determine students’ levels of English language proficiency separate from students’ content knowledge and that have the appropriate tools to distinguish between lack of linguistic abilities in English and learning disabilities;
 - reading instruction that emphasizes phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary-building and comprehension activities connected to meaningful literacy and writing instruction;
 - frequent teacher-led, structured opportunities for ELLs to discuss topics that are directly relevant to their lives and for them to

interact in the classroom with native English speakers; and

– native language instruction, where appropriate, to facilitate English language acquisition and content knowledge, delivered by teachers who are certified in the requisite content area(s) and paraprofessionals who work under the direct supervision of a teacher.

Questions & Answers

How is the AFT helping educators who work with English language learners (ELLs)?

In addition to advocating for our members on ELL issues, the AFT, in partnership with public broadcasting station WETA's Reading Rockets project, has launched the educators' section of the Web site, Colorín Colorado.

The Web site (www.colorincolorado.org) provides high-quality, research-based information on what educators—veteran, new, mainstream or specialized—can do to help their ELL students read and succeed academically. Colorín Colorado also includes bilingual information for Spanish-speaking parents on how to help their children succeed in school.

The AFT and WETA also developed the Colorín Colorado Toolkit for Teachers. The toolkit provides information on reaching out to Hispanic parents and offers guidance on how to make them a vital part of their children's education. It includes information about Hispanic cultures and values, suggestions for involving parents in classroom and school activities, concrete ideas, handouts and video modules for parent workshops focusing on literacy development for Hispanic English language learners in grades K-5. To order the toolkit, send a check for \$10 payable to the American Federation of Teachers and mail to: AFT Order Department, 555 New Jersey Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. Shipping and handling costs are included. Reference *Colorín Colorado Toolkit for Teachers*, Item #44-00CC.

What does the latest research say about effective literacy practices for ELLs?

The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth has recently released the most authoritative research synthesis to date on the development of literacy in preK-12 children who are ELLs (August and Shanahan 2006).

The research indicates that the key components of effective reading instruction for native English speakers identified by the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD] 2000)—phonemic awareness, phonics, oral language fluency, vocabulary, text comprehension and writing—also benefit ELLs, but with necessary adaptations such as extensive vocabulary instruction and oral English language development, cognate connections and the explicit instruction of idioms and words with multiple meanings.

What does the latest research say about what helps facilitate the process of English language literacy acquisition?

The National Literacy Panel also found that the diverse background and individual differences of ELLs have a significant impact on the development of English language literacy. Language proficiency in general, level of schooling prior to U.S. schooling, socioeconomic status, age, English oral proficiency, cognitive abilities, similarities and differences between the first language and English and other skill factors all influence how well and how quickly ELLs will develop English language literacy. To take these factors into account, a variety of interventions and instructional program models for ELLs are necessary.

Native language proficiency can facilitate the acquisition of English language literacy. The panel examined K-12 studies that compare bilingual instruction with English-only instruction and found that “language-minority students instructed in their native language as well as in English perform better, on average, on measures of English reading proficiency than language-minority students instructed only in English” (August and Shanahan 2006, p. 6). Three other major research reviews recently completed (Slavin and Cheung 2003; Rolstad, Mahoney and Glass 2005; Genesee et al. 2006) reach similar conclusions.

What is the range of effective instructional models for ELLs?

Currently, schools with effective instructional programs for ELLs implement various programs and strategies. Programs that are based on native language instruction are most commonly referred to as “bilingual education” programs. These programs include dual immersion programs, two-way bilingual programs, transitional bilingual programs, developmental or maintenance bilingual programs and others. In such programs, ELLs are often exposed to content instruction in their native language for specified periods of time during the school day.

In programs such as English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), English Language Development (ELD) and sheltered instruction, native language instruction is often minimal, but they include structured research-based supports and methods.

Regardless of the type of second language acquisition program (dual immersion, ESL, ESOL, sheltered instruction, transitional bilingual, etc.) a school is implementing, the key to a program’s effectiveness is that it be based on the research of language acquisition, that it include special instructional supports such as materials and resources designed for ELLs and that it be staffed by educators who know how to work with this group of students and who receive ongoing professional development support (August and Shanahan 2006; Genesee et al. 2006; National Research Council [NRC] 2006).

ELLs who are immediately placed in mainstream English-only or English immersion classrooms with no additional assistance often have lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates than their peers who receive specialized instruction (Genesee et al. 2006; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] 2006; NRC 2006).

What are some other factors that contribute to the academic achievement of ELLs?

Researchers, practitioners and experts (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO] 2004; WestEd 2004; Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center [CSRQC] 2005; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory [NWREL] 2004; American Institutes of Research [AIR]/WestEd

2006) have identified promising strategies that have raised ELLs' opportunities to excel academically and later in life:

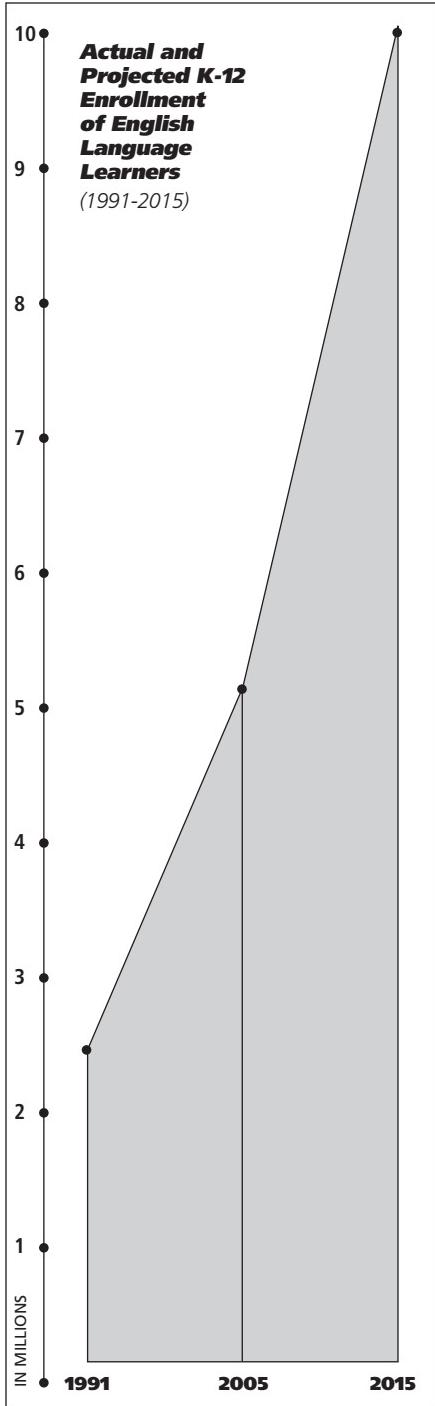
- teachers who are certified in the requisite areas and are well prepared and knowledgeable about second language acquisition;
- schoolwide buy-in to the importance of providing ELLs with a high-quality education and challenging standards;
- high-level standards developed for ELLs that incorporate language development into all content areas and are aligned to curriculum and assessment;
- appropriate assessments addressing content knowledge and English language proficiency separately;
- newcomer schools/programs;
- parent and family involvement;
- strong leadership by school administrators who understand the challenges ELLs face and what it takes to help them succeed; and
- partnerships with community-based organizations.

Background Information

The AFT's goal is to promote educational excellence and equity for English language learners (ELLs)—students in preK-12 who are working toward becoming proficient in reading, writing and communicating in the English language—to ensure they meet the same challenging standards required of all students. ELLs are the fastest-growing public school student population, and currently make up over 5 million students or close to 10.3 percent of public school enrollment (National Council of La Raza [NCLR] 2006) (see Tables on next page). In addition to learning a new language, most ELLs also have to adjust to a new environment and culture, as well as learn new academic skills and content knowledge. We must address the educational needs of ELLs and provide educators who teach them with the instructional support and assistance they need.

ELLs are multiracial, multinational and diverse in their educational and socioeconomic background. While more than 460 native languages are spoken in U.S. public schools (Office of English Language Acquisition [OELA] 2002), Spanish speakers account for approximately 80 percent of the total number of ELLs in the nation.

Poised to become an even more significant percentage of the nation's school population and workforce (approximately 20 percent of the workforce and half of the population under 18 by 2025), the economic and social impact ELLs will have on the nation's future cannot be underestimated or overlooked. Without considerable educational improvements and investments, these students will not be prepared to be successful participants in our global and technologically advanced economy. In calling for change, we uphold our core values



DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

ENROLLMENT

ELL K-12 Enrollment Increase between 1991 and 2005 **100%**

Non-ELL K-12 Enrollment Increase between 1991 and 2005 **15%**

ELLS in Grades PreK-3 **46%**

ELLS in Grades 4-8 **35%**

ELLS in Grades 9-12 **19%**

RACE

ELLS who are Latino **80%**

ELLS who are Asian **13%**

ELLS who are African, Caribbean, Eastern European, Middle Eastern or Other* **4.5%**

ELLS who are Native American, Alaska Native, Hawaiian Native **2.5%**

INCOME

ELLS in Grades PreK-5 who are Low-Income **68%**

ELLS in Grades 6-12 who are Low-Income **60%**

DROPOUT RATE

Latino Students **43%**

Non-Latino Students **6%**

* "Other" includes students from Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and India.

SOURCES: NCES. (2006). *Condition of Education*. / The President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. (2003). *From Risk to Opportunity, Fulfilling the Educational Needs of Hispanic Americans in the 21st Century*. / Urban Institute. (2000). *Overlooked and Underserved: Immigrant Students in U.S. Secondary Schools*. / OELA. (2002). *Survey of the States*. / NWREL. (2004). *English Language Learner Programs*. / NRC. (2006). *Hispanics and the Future of America*.

and tradition of full inclusion and participation, which are so essential to a democracy.

CHALLENGES TO CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

For more than 30 years, ELLs' levels of academic achievement and educational attainment rates have remained low, particularly for Latino ELLs. ELLs continue to have poor educational outcomes, the highest dropout rates in the nation, as well as low college preparatory coursework enrollment and post-secondary attainment.

On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often referred to as the "Nation's Report Card," the average score gap between ELLs and more advantaged peers in fourth, eighth and 12th grades is at least 30 points for every core subject, including writing and civics. As to students scoring at or above the basic achievement level in reading and math, 75 percent of more advantaged eighth-grade students scored at this level on the NAEP, compared to only 29 percent of ELLs (NCLR 2006). Similar achievement levels are reflected on state assessments. On reading comprehension assessments from 41 states, only 18.7 percent of ELLs scored above the state established norm (OELA 2002).

On an international comparison of immigrant students who are second language learners, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tested 15-year-olds in reading, math, scientific literacy and problem-solving. Immigrant students tend to be one to five years behind their peers (OECD 2006). On the most basic level of math proficiency, at least 30 percent of students in the U.S. scored well below the mark. The PISA results also demonstrate that immigrant student performance in the U.S. is one of the lowest among other industrialized countries.

Factors that contribute to ELLs' poor academic outcomes include high mobility rates, low enrollment in early childhood education programs, little or no prior formal schooling in their home country and lack of health services. Additionally, research by the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Research Council, the Urban Institute and others identify the key challenges jeopardizing ELLs from excelling academically and later in life:

- disproportionate attendance at resource-poor schools;

- lack of access to specialized instruction and staff;
- lack of participation in rigorous, college-preparatory coursework; and
- families who lack familiarity with the U.S. school system and who live in poverty.

Disproportionate attendance at resource-poor schools.

Almost half of all ELLs attend schools in central city school districts, most of which serve families with higher poverty rates than the state-wide average. On average, these schools receive about \$1,000 less per student than do schools with fewer minority students (U.S. Senate HELP Committee 2002). High-poverty, low-performing schools tend to lack other resources that the research shows—and teachers know—are needed for students to thrive. The schools lack fully qualified teachers who are retained through mentoring programs and other supports; strong professional development support networks for teachers and staff; long-term leadership; and high expectations and rigorous academic standards for students.

Lack of access to specialized instruction and staff.

Most schools are ill equipped to meet the academic needs of ELLs (NCELA 2002; August and Hakuta 1998). Most programs for ELLs, regardless of their structure, are not based on language acquisition research nor effective instruction for linguistically and culturally diverse populations; they do not have enough specialized staff; and most of the teachers and paraprofessionals working with ELLs lack the proper certification and/or expertise. In addition, programs and practices are not consistent within states, districts and even within different classrooms in the same school. They lack rigorous academics, high-quality language development and academic content standards that are aligned with curriculum and proper assessment practices (The Urban Institute 2000; NCES 2003).

English language learners with disabilities have even less access to adequate specialized intervention services than mainstream English language learners (Artiles and Ortiz 2002). Across the country, only a few districts have programs addressing language instruction and disabilities simultaneously and teachers that are adequately prepared to deliver both.

Lack of participation in rigorous college-preparatory coursework.

One reason ELLs do not attend college at the same rate as their peers is that they do not take the coursework to prepare them for college. The enrollment of ELLs in college preparatory courses such as Algebra 2, chemistry and Advanced Placement (AP) courses is low. Studies frequently cite that some teachers and administrators often relegate ELLs to less academically challenging coursework, do not inform them about the existence of such classes or do not hold them to high standards (The Urban Institute 2000; Tomas Rivera Policy Institute et al. 2003).

Families who lack familiarity with the U.S. school system and who live in poverty.

ELLs benefit just as much from their parents' involvement in their education as other students, but parents of ELLs do not often participate in school activities or have the necessary information to know what they need to do to assist their child or navigate the public school system. Immigrant parents may feel apprehensive about getting involved because of their limited English skills, prohibitive work schedules, lack of familiarity with mainstream culture and the public school system in the United States.

Poverty also has an adverse effect on academic achievement. Students who attended schools with large numbers of poor students had lower test scores than students who attended schools where less than 10 percent of the students were low-income (NCES 2001). The low level of education of most Latino parents is partially responsible for their low-income levels. Other contributing factors include the heavy concentration in low-wage jobs and limited English proficiency.

Background Reading & Resources

AFT RESOURCES

Colorín Colorado

This Web site's "For Educators" section, developed by the Reading Rockets Project of PBS Station WETA and the AFT, provides tools to help English language learners read and succeed. These helpful materials feature research-based instructional strategies and practices, interactive activities, cutting-edge resources, lesson plan ideas, monthly newsletters and more. It is all available at www.colorincolorado.org.

Closing the Achievement Gap: Focus on Latino Students

This policy brief provides the data and context to support the AFT's call for increased attention to the condition of education for Latino students. It discusses the current demographic and achievement trends of Latinos, some of the specific barriers to closing the achievement gap and presents a set of recommendations to improve educational opportunities for Latino children. 8 pages (March 2004). www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/PolBrief17.pdf

Teaching English Language Learners: What Does the Research Say?

This policy brief describes the ongoing debates over the most appropriate methods for educating students, the need

for stronger research into the educational attainment of English language learners (ELLs) and recommendations for developing quality programs for ELLs. 8 pages (February 2002). www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/policy14.pdf

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The majority of ELLs are concentrated in cities with AFT affiliates, such as: Albuquerque, Austin, Chicago, Corpus Christi, Houston, Hartford, Los Angeles, Newark, New York City, Miami, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Philadelphia, Rochester, San Antonio and San Francisco





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